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ART. XIII.—*A remarkable Appearance in the Indian Seas; in a Letter from* LIEUTENANT DAWSON. *Communicated by* WILLIAM NEWNHAM, Esq.

Read 2nd of December, 1837.

Royal Asiatic Society, Dec. 2, 1837.

I BEG leave to lay before the meeting an extract from the private journal of Lieutenant Henry Dawson, a very intelligent officer of the Royal Navy, at present employed on civil duties with the Indian Navy at Bombay, containing an account of a very extraordinary phenomenon, which was observed on the passage from Bombay to the Persian Gulf (the southern passage), on board the Honourable Company's sloop of war Clive, in 1832. On my first going to India, I was in the habit of intimacy with the late Captain David Seton, who was many years Resident at Muscat, and I well remember hearing him relate the circumstance of falling in with the *white sea*, described by Mr. Dawson, on his occasional voyages to Muscat, during the period of the south-west monsoon.¹ So many years, however, have since elapsed, I am unable to give any more detail of the circumstance related by that officer, and merely here allude to it in proof of the phenomenon having been before observed.

WILLIAM NEWNHAM.

DURING a passage from Bombay to the Persian Gulf, on board the Honourable Company's sloop Clive, on the 22nd of August, 1832, at a quarter before eight o'clock at night, a phenomenon appeared of the following nature, and to all on board, of an unheard-of-kind, which gave rise to transitory feelings of apprehension as to the vessel's contiguity to danger. Sailing under double-reefed top-sails and foresail, at the rate of nine and a half miles per hour, before a strong south-west monsoon wind, and a high sea, without any

¹ Our subsequent inquiries serve to confirm this statement, inasmuch as few navigators appear to have passed along the eastern coast of Arabia, in the months of June, July, and August, without noticing the discolourment of the water (but *during the night only*), and which, on examination when brought on board, is said to exhibit no difference whatever from sea-water in other parts of the ocean.—*Ed.*

indication of a change in the elements, the ship was surrounded *instantly* by water as white as milk or snow; it seemed to have no termination until it reached an altitude of seventy-five or eighty degrees, where it subsided in a strongly marked ecliptic, above which the heavens presented a beautiful and bright blueish cast, not dissimilar to polished steel. No line of horizon was visible; the dead white colour of the water close to the ship, as it increased in distance from her very gradually brightened, until, where I supposed the horizon to be, it assumed a silvery aspect, which, increasing as it ascended, became brilliant and dazzling towards the zenith, obscuring the stars and clouds which had before this visitation been distinctly visible. The sea in a moment became smooth; the ship, from rolling and labouring considerably, quite steady; no diminution in the wind occurred, but a sensation that it had fallen, even to a calm, was general, but momentary. This delusion was occasioned by the instantaneous steadiness of the vessel, as well as the cessation of the previous noise from the lashing of a mountainous and confused sea against the vessel's sides, and on her decks; her progress through the sea, however closely scrutinised, could not be observed; the disturbed water alongside and in her wake, as well as the foam around her bows, did not contrast with the adjoining unagitated fluid, notwithstanding, from the velocity of the ship through the water, these must have been considerable. Not a particle of phosphoric matter was once observable, either in the surrounding ocean, or in the water immediately displaced by the ship's passage through it; but when taken up in a bucket, and agitated with the hand, such was visible, but not in a greater proportion than is usual, nor did the water vary in appearance from common sea-water: nothing could be perceived to attribute this strange phenomenon to.

Animalcules of a minute kind were perceptible, as likewise a few pieces of a glutinous substance of a purple colour, but neither in any considerable quantity, nor differing from what is usually found in the seas of the Indian Ocean.

We sailed the distance of fifteen miles without the slightest change in the appearance of the sea or sky, when in a moment this extraordinary phenomenon vanished, the ship at the same instant encountering the like high and turbulent sea as previous to her envelopement.

The ship was not within one hundred miles of the eastern coast of Arabia, or of soundings, but sailing in what is termed deep ocean water.

I have before mentioned that the ship was quite steady during her progress through the white water; this was the case, with the exception, that in a few instances she gave a heavy roll, as if influenced by a following swell; these were not more frequent than once in a quarter of an hour. Latitude $21^{\circ} 40'$ north, $59^{\circ} 40'$ east; thermometer 87° , barometer twenty-nine inches and nine-tenths.

The phenomenon I have attempted to describe appeared twice after we were first extricated from it, for periods of about twenty minutes; its brilliancy, as well as influence over the waves, as previously described; the transition from high and mountainous seas to a smooth and seemingly quiet ocean, and change again to turbulence, was as sudden as a flash of lightning.

On my arrival at Muscat, a few days after, I endeavoured to gain some information on the foregoing matter, but beyond finding that the phenomenon was occasionally met during the strength of the south-west monsoon, about the limit noted, and that the water was then *quite fresh*, I could ascertain nothing satisfactory. My informants were the Nakodas, or captains of His Highness the Imam's ships of war, who frequently navigate between Muscat and Zanzibar, consequently must pass about the spot the Clive met what I have related. The Arab captains were firm in their assertion in the particular of the fresh water, although they confessed that they had never tasted it. I did, as also the surgeon of the vessel, and, as I mentioned before, it did not vary in any way from ordinary seawater.

H. D.
